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Omar Khayyám
Browne, Edward Granville
Yet more light on
Umar-i-Khayyām.

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YET MORE LIGHT
ON
'UMAR - I - KHAYYAM

by

E.G.Browne, M.R.A.S.

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25.5.43ART. XIII.—*Yet More Light on 'Umar-i-Khayyām.*

By E. G. BROWNE, M.R.A.S.

As Mr. Beveridge has referred to my criticism (which is in reality not mine, but Professor A. Müller's, cited by Professor Houtsma in a footnote on pp. xiv-xv of his edition of al-Bundārī's History of the Seljūqs) on the now familiar story of 'Umar's covenant with the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk and Ḥasan-i-Šabbāh, I should be glad to have an opportunity of stating that my recent reading has shown me that this tale at least reposes on more ancient and respectable authority than either the *Rawdatu-š-Safā* or the *Tārīkh-i-Alfī*, namely, on that of the *Jāmi'u't-Tawārīkh* of Rashīdu'd-Dīn, who was put to death in A.H. 718. The passage, cited from f. 292^b of the British Museum MS., ADD. 7,628, runs as follows:—

و عداوت و وحشت را میان ایشان سبب آن بود که سیدنا
و عمر خیّام و نظام الملک به نیشاپور در کتاب بودند چنانکه
عادت ایام صبی و رسم کودکان باشد قاعدهٔ مصادقت و مصافحت
مهمّ و مسلوک میداشتند تا غایتی که خون یکدیگر بخوردند
و عهد کردند که از ما هر کدام که بدرجهٔ بزرگ و مرتبهٔ عالی رسد
دیگران را تربیت و تقویت کند از اتفاق بموجبی که در تاریخ آل
سلجوق مسطور و مذکورست نظام الملک بوزارت رسید عمر
خیّام بخدمت او آمد و عنود و موافقت ایام کودکی با یاد داد
نظام الملک حقوق قدیم بشناخت و گفت تولیت نیشاپور
و نواحی آن تراست عمر مرد بزرگ حکیم فاضل عاقل بود

1889

گفت سودای ولایت داری و امر و نهی عوامم مرا برسبیل مشاھره و مسانہه اداری وظیفئہ فرمای، نظام الملک اورا ده هزار دینار ادرا رکرد از محروسه نیشاپور که سال بسال بی تنقیض و تنقیض ممضی و مجری دارند، و همچنین سیدنا از شهر ری بخدمت او رفت و گفت الکریم اذا وعد وفا، نظام الملک گفت تولیت ری یا از آن اصفهان اختیار فرمای، سیدنا همستی عالی داشت بدان مقدار قانع و راضی نشد و قبول نکرد چه توقع شرکت در وزارت می داشت، نظام الملک گفت یکچندی ملازمت حضرت سلطان نمای و چون دانست که طالب وزارت است و قصد جاه و مرتبه او دارد ازوا احتراز و احوذار می نمود، بعد از چند سال سلطان را از نظام الملک اندک مایه و حشمتی ظاهر شد ازو رفع حسابات خواست

“Now the cause of the enmity and mistrust which existed between them [i.e. the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk and Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāh] was this, that ‘Our Master’ [*Sayyidnā*, the title given to Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāh, as explained earlier, by his followers] and ‘Umar-i-Khayyām and the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk were at school together in Nishāpūr, and, as is the custom of boyish days and the way of children, they inaugurated and pursued a rule of friendship and devotion which culminated in their drinking of each other’s blood and swearing a solemn oath that whichever of them should attain to high rank and lofty degree should patronize and help the others.

“Now it chanced, by a train of circumstances fully set forth in the ‘History of the House of Seljūq’ [*Tārīkh-i-Āl-i-Saljūq*], that the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk attained to the position of Prime Minister. ‘Umar-i-Khayyām waited upon him and reminded him of the vows and covenants of their boyish days. The Nidhāmu'l-Mulk, recognizing these old claims, said, ‘The government of Nishāpūr and the surrounding

districts is thine.' But 'Umar, who was a great man, and withal an eminent philosopher and a man of sense, replied, 'I have no desire for the government of a province or for the restraining of the people by command and prohibition. Rather assign to me an allowance or stipend of the nature of a salary or pension.' So the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk assigned him an allowance of ten thousand dīnārs from the treasury of Nīshāpūr, to be paid and delivered to him year by year without diminution or charge.

"In like manner 'Our Master' [Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāḥ] came from the city of Ray to wait on him, and said, 'The noble man, when he promises, performs.' 'Choose,' answered the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk, 'the government of Ray or that of Isfahān.' 'Our Master,' being a man of high ambition, was not contented or satisfied with so much, and refused to accept it; for he cherished hopes of participating in the office of Prime Minister. So the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk bade him attend the King's Court for a while; but, perceiving that he was desirous of the post of Prime Minister, and was aiming at his position and office, avoided him, and continued on his guard against him. After some years the King conceived a slight mistrust of the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk, and required of him a statement of the revenue accounts." [The remainder of the narrative agrees substantially with that of the spurious *Waṣāyā*, the *Dabistān*, and the histories of Mīrkhwānd and Khwāndamīr, given by Whinfield on pp. ix-xi of the Introduction to his *Quatrains of 'Omar Khayyām* (Trübner, 1883), and familiar to all of that large and increasing class who interest themselves more or less seriously in the Astronomer-Poet.]

An older and better authority than even the *Jāmi'u't-Tawārīkh* for the history of the Assassins and their founder (with which the history of 'Umar-i-Khayyām and the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk is so closely linked in the tradition above cited) is the *Jahān-Kushā*, the author of which, 'Alā'u'd-Dīn 'Aṭā Malik Juvaynī, was present with Hulāgū Khān at the capitulation of Alamūt, the chief stronghold of the Persian Assassins, in A.H. 654, and was entrusted with the

task of examining the books of the sect preserved in that place, with a view to the destruction of all such as savoured of heresy. Amongst these books, as he informs us (British Museum MS., OR. 155, f. 255^a), he found a volume containing the biography and adventures of Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāḥ, called by them [i.e. the Assassins] 'the Adventures of Our Master' [*Sar-guzasht-i-Sayyidnā*], from which he derived most of the particulars which he gives of the career of that remarkable man. These particulars, which are very full, and are illustrated by numerous citations from the 'Adventures,' include Ḥasan's genealogy—

الحسن بن علي بن محمد بن جعفر بن الحسين بن الصباح الحميري

and a good many dates, including the following:—

A.H. 464. Ḥasan takes the Ismā'īlī oath of allegiance at the hands of the *dā'ī* Amīr Ḍarrāb (who, according to the *Jāmi'u't-Tawārīkh*, succeeded Nāṣir-i-Khusraw as head of the Ismā'īlī propaganda in Khurāsān), or Bū Najm-i-Sarrāj, or 'Abdu'l-Malik 'Aṭṭāsh. [My notes are here too scanty to enable me, in the absence of the MSS., to say with certainty which of the three is intended.]

A.H. 469. Ḥasan starts for Egypt, which he reaches in —

A.H. 471 (Ṣafar 18 = Aug. 30, A.D. 1078), after a journey lasting a year and a half.

A.H. 473. Ḥasan returns from Egypt to Isfahān.

A.H. 483. Alamūt seized by Ḥasan and his followers.

[The curious coincidence that the sum of the numerical values of the letters composing the full name of the castle, *Āluh-āmū't* (آله آموت) gives the date of its capture by Ḥasan ($1+30+5+1+40+6+400=483$) is noticed by Ḥamdu'llāh Mustawfī in his *Tārīkh-i-Guzīda*. The name is generally explained (even in the two old histories now under consideration) as meaning "the Eagle's Nest" (آشیانه), but I think there can be no doubt that

Ibnū'l Athīr is right in saying (cf. Defrémery's *Histoire des Seldjoukides et des Ismaéliens ou Assassins de l'Iran, extrait No. 5 de l'année 1848 du Journal Asiatique*, p. 116, n. 2) that its real meaning in the Daylamī dialect is "the Eagle's Teaching" or "Showing" (تعليم العقب), for *āluh* = eagle (cf. Nöldeke's *Geschichte d. Artakshūr-i-Pāpakān*, p. 59, n. 2), while *āmū't* is merely the dialectical form of *āmūkht*, this dropping of the quiescent *خ* after a long vowel being of constant occurrence in the dialects.]

- A.H. 485. Amīr Arslān Tāsh is sent to attack Alamūt by Malikshāh, the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk having resolved to extirpate the Assassins. The siege is unsuccessful, and the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk is assassinated on the 10th of Ramaḍān in this year (= Oct. 14, A.D. 1092).
- A.H. 487 (10th of Dhu'l-Ḥijja = Dec. 21, A.D. 1094). Death of Mustansīr, the eighth Fāṭimid Caliph, after a reign of 60 years; and disputed succession between his sons Musta'li (who actually succeeded him) and Nizār (whose cause was espoused by all the Persian Ismā'ilīs, but who was bricked up alive by his brother).
- A.H. 493. Propaganda in favour of Nizār inaugurated at Isfahān, and alarm of Barkiyāruq the Seljūq.
- A.H. 495. Assassination of Musta'li.
- A.H. 518 (Wed., the 6th of Rabī' II = May 23, A.D. 1124). Death of Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāḥ.

I now propose to examine the dates which Mr. Beveridge attempts to establish, and to show that some at least of them are untenable, if that be admitted which appears an obvious canon of historical criticism, viz. that *caeteris paribus* the older account of any transaction is entitled to greater credence than the more modern, especially when it can be definitely traced back to a writer of repute and intelligence who was contemporary, or almost contemporary, with the events he describes, or who had at his disposal sources of unusual authority. Thus, Nidhāmī-i-'Arūḍī of Samarqand,

the author of the *Chahār Maqāla*, was personally acquainted with 'Umar-i-Khayyām, and therefore is more likely to give correct information about him than late writers such as those cited by Mr. Beveridge, and this writer (of whose *Chahār Maqāla* I have made a complete translation, which will, I hope, appear in the next two numbers of the Journal) relates two anecdotes concerning 'Umar in the chapter consecrated to Astrologers.

The first of these (Ṭīhrān lith. of A.H. 1305, pp. 130-131) relates to 'Umar's prognostication, made in A.H. 506 (A.D. 1112-1113) at Balkh, in the Street of the Slave-sellers, in the house of Amīr Abū Sa'd, in the presence of Khwāja Mudhaffar-i-Isfīzārī and the author, that the trees should shed their blossoms (not roses, as the "Omarites" do falsely suppose; for *gul* in Persian means not only the rose, but any flower, and the sequel shows that the blossoms whereby the prognostication was fulfilled were those of pear-trees and peach-trees—*amrūd u zardālū*) on his grave. This story shows clearly that 'Umar was alive at least a year after the date (A.H. 505) in which Mr. Beveridge would like to place his death, and probably several years later, for the writer continues:—"When I arrived at Nīshāpūr in the year A.H. 530 (= A.D. 1135-1136), it being then some years since that great man [i.e. 'Umar] had veiled his countenance in the dust, . . . I went to visit his grave."

The second anecdote (Ṭīhrān lith., pp. 131-133) relates to an astrological prediction made by 'Umar "in the winter of the year A.H. 508" (A.D. 1114-1115), *three* years after the date assigned to his decease by Mr. Beveridge. The latter, therefore, cannot, in my opinion, be defended, and there seems to be no reason for abandoning the date (A.H. 517: see Rieu's *Persian Catalogue*, p. 546) hitherto generally accepted.

As regards Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāḥ, the date A.H. 518 is given as that of his death, not only by the *Jāmi'u't-Tawārīkh*, but also by *Ibnu'l-Athīr* and the author of the *Tārīkh-i-Guzīda*.

As regards the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk, the date of so important an event as his assassination was not likely to be forgotten,

and we find, in point of fact, all reputable authorities at one in placing it in Ramaḍān, A. H. 485. Ibnu'l-Athīr definitely states, in recounting his death, that he was born in A. H. 408; while his age is stated by the *Jāmi'u't-Tawārīkh* to have been at the time of his death not, as Mr. Beveridge asserts (on what authority I know not), "about seventy-five," but "over eighty," which agrees very well with Ibnu'l-Athīr.

I think, therefore, that we may take it for granted—

- (1) That the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk was born in A. H. 408 (= A. D. 1017), or thereabouts, at the very latest.
- (2) That it is exceedingly improbable that 'Umar-i-Khayyām and Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāḥ, both of whom died natural deaths in the years A. H. 517-518 (= A. D. 1123-1124), were more than a hundred years old at the time of their decease.
- (3) That even if we assume both 'Umar and Ḥasan to have been centenarians, and consequently place their births about A. D. 1023, they would still have been six years younger than the Nidhāmu'l-Mulk, and the three could hardly have been 'boys' or 'children' together, as is implied in the *Jāmi'u't-Tawārīkh*.
- (4) That the story is exceedingly improbable, though not absolutely impossible, and, did it rest merely on books like the spurious *Waṣāyā*, the *Dabistān*, etc., would scarcely merit serious consideration; but that the testimony of the *Jāmi'u't-Tawārīkh*, both on account of its early date, and the repute of its author as a historian, cannot be dismissed so lightly.

It must, however, be borne in mind that no great lapse of time is needed for the growth even of legends of a far more surprising character. The spurious Autobiography of Nāṣir-i-Khusraw, regarded by Ethé as "a fabrication of the ninth or tenth century of the *hijra*, unworthy of serious attention," is hardly richer in marvels than the notice given by Qazwīnī in his *Āthāru'l-Bilād* (ed. Wüstenfeld, pp. 328-9, s.v. يَمِينَان), written in the first half of the

seventh century of the *hijra*, not more than 200 years after the poet's death. It would, I believe, be worth while to make a careful examination and analysis of the spurious Autobiography, with a view to determining which portions were, or might be, genuinely historical, which were absolutely fictitious, and which could be traced to a confusion of identities. I am almost convinced, for example, that that portion of the narrative which deals with the adventures of Nāṣir amongst the *Malāhida* ('Heretics,' a term especially used to denote the Assassins, who, of course, did not exist at this epoch, since their power in the Caspian provinces began with the seizure of Alamūt by Ḥasan-i-Šabbāḥ in A.H. 483, and he himself, their founder, was, as we have already seen at p. 412 *supra*, converted to the Ismā'īlī doctrines by Nāṣir-i-Khusraw's successor, Amīr Ḍarrāb) arose from a confusion of him with the celebrated philosopher Naṣir-i-Ṭūsī (d. A.H. 655), who actually did compose the first edition of his well-known *Akhlāq-i-Nāṣirī* for the Ismā'īlī governor of Qubistān, Nāṣiru'd-Dīn 'Abdu'r-Raḥīm b. Abī Mansūr. (See Rieu's *Persian Catalogue*, pp. 441-2.) It is also worth noticing that the anecdote given in the spurious Autobiography, and translated at pp. 479-480 of my *Year amongst the Persians*, concerning the rending in pieces of one of Nāṣir's disciples by the orthodox at Nīshāpūr, is also given in the short notice of Nāṣir's life prefixed to the selections from his poems in the India Office MS. No. 132 (Selections from six old Persian poets, dated A.H. 714), and is therefore of considerable antiquity.

As I have had occasion to mention Nāṣir-i-Khusraw, I should like to declare my complete agreement with the view held by Dr. Ethé and the late M. Schefer as to the identity of the poet and the traveller. The case for the dual theory is most clearly stated by Professor Rieu (*Pers. Cat.*, p. 380), but nearly all his objections to the identity of the poet with the traveller can be met; for—

- (1) I have read carefully through the whole *Divān* of the poet (Tabrīz lith. of A.H. 1280) and find no single

allusion to Isfahān, but a great many to Khurāsān, amongst which the following clearly shows that it was the poet's birthplace (p. 241):—

‘گرچه مرا اصل خراسانی است’ از پس پیروی و مہیبی و سہری
 دوستی عشرت و خانہ رسول’ کرد مرا ہمگی و مازندری

“Although my origin is from Khurāsān, after spiritual leadership, authority, and supremacy
 Love for the Family and House of the Prophet have made me a man of Yamgān and Māzandarān.”

- (2) The chronological difficulty presented by the dates found in some copies of the *Rawshanā'ī Nāma* (A.H. 420, Gotha MS.; A.H. 343, Leyden MS.) is to be overcome, as maintained by Ethé, only by a rejection of these dates as clerical errors; for no one has hitherto ventured to maintain that the *Divān* of Nāsir-i-Khusraw and the *R. N.* are by different authors, and—
- (3) As pointed out by Ethé, the author of the *Divān* explicitly states (Tabrīz lith., p. 110) that he was born in A.H. 394, and that, after spending the first part of his life in worldliness and dissipation, he began to “seek after wisdom” at the age of 42 (elsewhere, speaking in round numbers, he speaks of his age at this turning-point in his life as 40, e.g., Tabrīz lith., p. 217), i.e. about A.H. 436.
- (4) In the *Safar-nāma* (ed. Schefer, p. ۳), in relating the dream which caused him to set out on his travels to search for Truth, he says that he had “awakened from a sleep of forty years”; and, a few lines lower down, he gives the date of his departure on his journey as Thursday, 6th of Jumāda II, A.H. 437; all of which very closely and strikingly corresponds with the above deductions concerning the author of the *Divān*.

- (5) In the *Jāmi'u't - Tawārīkh* (British Museum MS., ADD. 7,628), besides the reference to Nāṣir-i-Khusraw (f. 290^a) as the head of the Ismā'īlī propoganda in Khurāsān, he is again mentioned on f. 286^b as follows:—

و ناصر خسرو باوازند مستنصر از خراسان بمصر آمد و هفت سال
در آنجا ساکن بود و هر سال بحج میرفت و بمصر رجوع میفرمود
و آخر برادر حج بمصر آمد و با خراسان گشت و ببلخ دعوت
علویان مصر میکرد ' اعدا قصد او کردند ' بر کوه سمنکان متواری شد
و تا بیست سال بر آنجا بماند و آب و گیاهی قناعت می نمود
و حسن بن صباح حمیری یمنی از عجم بصورت نجار پیش المستنصر
بالله [رفت] و در خواست که دعوت تو در بلاد عجم کنم ' اورا
اجازت داد و او بخلوت از مستنصر پرسید که بعد از تو بر که دعوت
کنم ' گفت بر فرزندم نزار آنکه بهترست ' باین سبب اسمعیلیه
بامامت نزار قایل اند ' و سیدنا اختیار قلاع قهستان کرد چنانکه
بعد ازین خواهیم گفتن '

"Nāṣir-i-Khusraw, attracted by the fame of al-Mustanṣir, came from Khurāsān to Egypt, where he abode seven years, performing the pilgrimage every year and returning to Egypt. Finally he came, after performing the pilgrimage, to Baṣra, and returned to Khurāsān, where he carried on a propoganda for the 'Alids of Egypt' [i.e. the Fāṭimid Caliphs] in Balkh. His enemies attempted to destroy him, and he became a fugitive in the mountain of Simingān, where he remained for twenty years, content to exist on water and herbs. Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāḥ, the Himyarite, of Yemen, came from Persia before al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh disguised as a carpenter, asking his permission to carry

on a propaganda for him in the Persian lands. This permission having been accorded to him, he enquired secretly of al-Mustaṣṣir in whose name the propaganda should be carried on after his death. 'In the name of my son Nizār,' replied the Caliph, 'who is the elder.' For this reason the Ismā'īlīs [of Persia] maintain the Imāmate of Nizār. And 'Our Master' [i.e. Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāḥ] chose [as the centres of his propaganda] the Castles of Qubistān, as we shall presently relate."

Now in his *Safar-nāma* Nāṣir-i-Khusraw mentions visiting Mecca for the *fourth* time in A.H. 442 (ed. Schefer, p. ۱۷), and returning thence to Baṣra in A.H. 443 (p. ۸۵), Isfahān in Muḥarram, A.H. 444 (p. ۱۲), and Khurāsān in Jumāda II, A.H. 444, all of which agrees pretty well with the above. At this last date he must have been about 50 years of age (since seven years elapsed between his departure for Egypt, at the age of 42, and his return thence). Twenty years more in Sīmingān (see B. de Meynard's *Dict. . . de la Perse*, pp. 317, 318, s.v. سیمگان) would bring him to the age of 70. In his *Dīwān* he incidentally mentions his age in numerous passages; e.g., age 40 and 42 (Tabrīz lith., pp. 217 and 110); age 50 (pp. 20, 219, 230, 263); age 50 and odd (p. 78); age 60 (pp. 24, 79, 102, 164, 173, 179, 199, 244); age 62 (pp. 166, 171); age 60 and odd (p. 70); and he also gives the period of his pilgrimages and stay in Egypt as six years (p. 113). As the author of the *Safar-nāma* reached Egypt in Ṣafar, A.H. 439, and came to Baṣra on his homeward journey in Sha'bān, A.H. 443, his sojourn in the West was, in fact, only four years and a half, but he appears to have reckoned from the date of his departure from Khurāsān (Jumāda II, A.H. 437) to his return thither (Jumāda II, A.H. 444), which was exactly seven years. As he performed the pilgrimage, so far as practicable, *every year* during this seven years' absence from home, it is easy to see how the implication of the *Jāmi'u't-Tawārīkh*, that he performed it seven times, arose.

I think, therefore, that there can be no doubt as to the identity of the poet Nāṣir-i-Khusraw and the traveller Nāṣir-i-Khusraw, and that the dualistic theory must be finally abandoned. Indeed, it seems to have been necessitated merely by the statements of late biographers, like Dāwlatshāh, who drew their information from the spurious autobiography and other equally untrustworthy sources.



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Omar Khayyām

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